



S.T.O.P.

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Operations and Procedures

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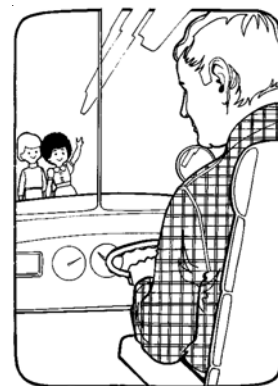
School Bus Driver Appreciation Week Is April 9–15

The State Department of Education and the eighty-five public school districts will observe School Bus Driver Appreciation Week from April 9 through 15 this year.

Historically, Driver Appreciation Week has been a time to recognize and to celebrate the many positive contributions school bus drivers make to a student's total educational experience. It is a week when the entire education community—students, parents, teachers, school staff, and administrators—can take a step back from their normal routines and pay tribute to the group of employees who must contend with traffic hazards, adverse weather conditions, and many other obstacles to safely deliver students to school and back home again, one hundred eighty days every year.

South Carolina has one of the safest and most efficient school bus transportation systems in the nation. This achievement is no mere accident; it is the direct result of the dedication and professionalism of many men and women who can proudly call themselves school bus drivers.

During the week of April 9–15, let's all stand up and salute the members of one of South Carolina's most successful teams, our *school bus drivers*!



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Transportation Director Wins National Recognition

The director of the State Department of Education's Office of Transportation has won national recognition for his service to school bus operations in South Carolina and across the nation.



The National Association for Pupil Transportation presented its 2005 NAPT Distinguished Service Award to Donald Tudor, who has directed South Carolina's school bus operations for fourteen years. NAPT said it recognizes one person each year "who exemplifies principles of high-caliber leadership" and who works to "ensure the pupil transportation industry's reputation for safe, responsible, and economical service to our passengers."

Since 1981, NAPT has honored twenty-six people with the award. NAPT is the school transportation industry's largest and most diverse membership organization, with public and private sector members throughout the United States and Canada as well as several countries in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

Tudor has been involved in transportation since the early 1970s, getting his start by helping to organize a regional transit authority in South Carolina and later becoming director of transportation policy for Governor Dick Riley. As director of the SDE's Office of Transportation since 1991, Tudor has supervised school bus operations throughout South Carolina, where more than 5,000 buses transport over 330,000 children every day.

"This recognition is wonderful for Don, and it is richly deserved," said State Superintendent Inez Tenenbaum. "Year after year, he and his transportation colleagues work miracles to keep our aging

bus fleet on the road and operating safely. It's gratifying to see that his expertise is appreciated well beyond the borders of South Carolina."

During the 1990s, Tudor assisted a Columbia woman, Lisa Strebler, in her campaign to prohibit the use of 15-passenger vans for school transportation. Strebler's six-year-old son, Jacob, was killed in 1994 when a truck rammed into the 15-passenger van that he was riding in. "Jacob's Law," approved by the South Carolina General Assembly in 2000, was the first law in the nation designed to curtail the use of such vans for school transportation.

Tudor has just completed his sixth year—the maximum term—on the NAPT Board of Directors. He served as the region 2 director, representing the Southeast, and for the past four years, he has served as the Board's secretary and treasurer.

"In addition to his countless hours of volunteer work for NAPT, our honoree this year has been equally active in other industry organizations and activities," NAPT said of Tudor.

"He is a longtime member of the state directors association as well as the Pupil Transportation Safety Institute, serving on the boards of these organizations and helping to improve collaboration among the groups. He has contributed his time to the efforts of the National Congress on School Transportation, held every five years, and the Southeastern States Pupil Transportation Conference, held annually."

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The above article is an edited version of a news release issued December 9, 2005, by the SDE's Office of Public Information.

SESPTC Seeking Applications for Postsecondary Education Scholarship

The Southeastern States Pupil Transportation Conference (SESPTC) is a Virginia nonprofit corporation created over fifty-five years ago to host an annual conference focused on educating student transportation professionals working in the Southeast.

This year, the SESPTC has approved the awarding of a \$1,000 scholarship to a deserving student in each of its fourteen member states whose parent or guardian has been actively employed in school transportation for the past five years and whose family has had a gross taxable income of less than \$60,000 during each of the past five tax years.

The children of bus drivers, bus aides/monitors, bus mechanics, directors of student transportation services, bus supervisors, bus driver trainers, bus safety inspectors, and those serving in related positions as employees of a school district or its contractors or the State Department of Education—all are eligible for the SESPTC scholarship.

The student must hold a high school diploma and must have been accepted by a postsecondary institution for the 2006–07 school year. The scholarship funds must be used to cover the student's expenses—tuition, books, fees, and related costs—at the institution during the 2006–07 school year.

For further information and an application form, go online at <http://www.myschools.com/offices/trn>.

Applications must be submitted by May 16, 2006, and must be mailed to Donald N. Tudor, Director, Office of Transportation, State Department of Education, Room 209-A, 1429 Senate Street, Columbia, SC 29201.

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South Carolina Stands to Receive School Bus Surplus

COLUMBIA, S.C. (March 1, 2006) – A bill appropriating nearly \$13.1 million for the state's school bus operations took one step closer to being passed as Senate members approved a House version that would move toward correcting historic underfunding.

The legislation, S 1026, would not earmark funds for new school bus purchases instead concentrating the money on fuel and bus parts. Donald Tudor, South Carolina's state director of transportation, said he expected to see purchase money set as a separate line item in the forthcoming House budget.

"This provides adequate funds to pay our fuel bill this year and the carryover is for the fiscal year 2007 budget for maintenance," he said. "We're very pleased."

The bill is pending a full Senate vote. The state's school bus department stands to receive \$5 million this year to cover the current deficit and would carryover \$8 million to next year.

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The above article is taken from School Transportation News, online at http://www.stnonline.com/artman/publish/article_4890.shtml.

Railroad Crossings

By Dale Smith, SDE Driver Training Instructor

When I am out on the road observing buses or conducting behind-the-wheel testing sessions, I often see bus drivers who are not using the correct procedures of crossing a railroad.

Perhaps these drivers are not aware of the changes South Carolina made to its railroad crossing procedures for the 2004–05 school year, or maybe they have simply made a conscious decision to ignore those procedures. But whatever their reason for failing to cross a railroad track correctly, now is a good time to review the proper procedures.



These are the steps you must follow:

1. Move to the right-most lane on multilane highways well before you get to a railroad crossing.
2. Check your mirrors.
3. Turn on your hazard lights at least 100 to 300 feet before the crossing.
4. Stop smoothly at least 15 feet, but not more than 50 feet, from the nearest rail. Never cross the stop line painted on the roadway.
5. Turn off heaters, fans, and any other on-board devices that are making noise. Require students to be quiet. Use a signal that you reserve only for railroad crossings to remind them.
6. While you are stopped, look and listen for any rail traffic. Open the window to your left and open the service door to look and listen.
7. Make certain there will be enough room on the other side of the railroad for your bus to completely clear the tracks after you have crossed.
8. If you do not hear or see a train, *close the service door*, and proceed across the track. *Always close the door right before crossing the track.*
9. Deactivate the hazard lights once the bus has fully cleared the tracks.

If you do see an approaching train, follow this procedure:

1. Set the bus park brake, move the gear selector to "neutral," and keep your foot on the service brake while you wait for the train to pass.
2. When the train has passed and you are sure it is safe to proceed, put the gear selector in "drive," release the park brake, *close the door*, and cross the tracks.
3. As usual, deactivate the hazard lights once the bus has fully cleared the tracks.

Remember, *any time* is train time:

- You must stop at any railroad crossing where signs or road markings remain, *even if the crossing is no longer in use.*
- You must stop at every railroad crossing, *even if there are no students aboard your bus.*
- If the warning lights are flashing at a crossing but you see no indications of a train approaching, *do not cross. It is illegal to do so.* You may cross the track with the warning lights flashing only under the direction of a railroad employee or law enforcement officer.
- If there are multiple tracks to cross, *make only one stop.* Follow the regularly required crossing procedure and *cross all the tracks at the same time.* Take extra care.
- *Never* drive onto a railroad track until you are sure there is enough room for your entire bus to clear the track completely.
- If your bus is on the tracks when the crossing gates begin to lower, *keep moving. Do not stop, even if it means breaking a crossing gate.*
- If there is a traffic light on the other side of the tracks, make sure your bus will fully clear the tracks if that light should turn red once you have started across.



Go Defense!

By Rob Grimes, SDE Driver Training Instructor

When most people hear the word “defense,” they automatically think of football or some other type of team sport.

So how does “defense” relate to safely transporting students to and from school? Most school bus accidents, injuries, and fatalities are the result of driver errors—mistakes caused by everything from driver impairment to carelessness, recklessness, and inattention.

Statistics show that the use of defensive driving techniques reduces bus accidents. You can create a safety cushion around your bus

- by making sure you are looking as far ahead as possible to determine hazards and making adjustments to avoid them,
- by making sure you have an unobstructed view completely around your bus,
- by checking your mirrors often, and
- by backing your bus only when you absolutely must.

And remember: if you are distracted, even for a second, your potential for an accident is greatly increased. So *go defense!*



How Fast Is Too Fast?

Almost every driver, even those with limited knowledge of defensive driving techniques, will tell you that a conscientious driver is constantly adjusting the speed of his or her vehicle to suit the conditions of the road, weather, lighting, and traffic. A good driver never assumes that the posted speed limit is the safest speed. School bus drivers, in particular, must realize that in many instances the speed a car or truck may travel is not always a safe speed for a school bus to travel.

Many of you likely know a driver who, regardless of their driving environment, always drives the posted speed limit. The person’s attitude is “The highway experts make the rules and determine road speed limits, so who am I to argue with the experts? If they say 55 miles an hour is a safe speed for this road, then that’s the speed I’ll drive.”

What these drivers must realize, however, is that the posted speed limit is meant only for ideal driving conditions. It does not take into consideration the many things that are constantly changing in the driving environment.

Our school bus speed-limit law—Section 59-67-515 of the Code of Laws of South Carolina—states that “No public school bus may be operated in this State in excess of forty-five miles an hour, except when traveling on a highway with a posted maximum speed limit above fifty-five miles an hour, or when traveling to and from special events which necessitate travel on interstate or state primary highways. Special event variances from the authorized speed limit for public school buses must be obtained by written authorization from the Department of Education. In no instance may the public school bus be authorized to exceed the speed of fifty-five miles an hour. Public school buses are not required to have devices to govern the speed or operation of the vehicles.”

This law entails the following facts:

- On all secondary state or county highway systems in South Carolina, the maximum speed for a school bus is 45 miles an hour, with or without special authorization.
- On U.S. and S.C. primary highways, route buses cannot exceed 45 miles an hour. However, when a bus is operating under a special authorization permitted for an activity trip, the maximum speed is 55 miles an hour.
- On interstate highways or S.C. primary highways with a posted maximum speed limit above 55 miles an hour, any bus may travel up to 55. This includes both regular routes and permitted trips—no special authorization is required.
- No school bus can ever legally exceed 55 miles an hour on any roadway.

To be a safe driver, you must continuously make adjustments and allowances in your driving. You can never exceed the maximum posted speed, and in fact, you cannot always drive the maximum speed posted for the roadway. Instead, you will adjust the speed of your vehicle to meet the prevailing road conditions and the overall traffic environment at the particular moment.



Buying Used School Buses Makes Sense

By Ted Pitts

The following article was originally published October 22, 2005, on TheColumbiaRecord.com Web site at <http://palmettostatelitics.thecolumbiarecord.com>. It is reprinted here with the permission of its author.

I have read and seen where some very smart people and individuals for whom I have a great deal of respect have said that South Carolina does not need to buy used school buses from other states. I wonder what I am missing, because I think this is a pretty good solution to help our state's aging fleet of school buses. After hearing that the State Department of Education purchased used buses from Kentucky, I wrote Inez Tenenbaum a letter telling her I was pleased at her "fiscally conservative approach" to South Carolina's problematic school bus situation. I think Inez, Donald Tudor, and the staff at the State Department of Education deserve a lot of credit for finding a solution to a problem with very little help or resources.

First and foremost, these used buses are safe and reliable. Any argument that says they are not safe is inaccurate. If they were not safe, the Department of Education would not even consider this as an option. The used buses are 1992s and will need more attention than a brand-new bus, but they have been serviced regularly and well maintained.

A school bus is a school bus, and the used buses have air brakes, power steering and the standard safety devices (flashing lights, retractable stop sign, etc.) you find on all school buses. These new buses meet all bus safety standards and are actually equipped with more, not fewer, safety features than the buses they are replacing as well as many of the other buses in the fleet that will continue to stay in service.

Second, buying used buses saves the taxpayers money in the short and long terms. Just as those of us who choose to drive used vehicles know, you can change a lot of oil and replace a lot of parts before you come close to spending the amount of money that makes up the difference between the price of a new and used car. We know that these buses the state is purchasing have been maintained by the seller and are in good working order.

I just sold my 1996 GMC Yukon with 210,000 miles on it for \$3,800 and replaced it with a 2003 Chevy Tahoe with 25,000 miles and paid \$25,500. These cars are basically the same vehicle—one is just 7 years newer. I consider myself fairly conservative when it comes to automobiles. I have never purchased a new car and have owned only a few cars/trucks in

my 17 years of driving, but the neighbor who bought my car is the smart one.

I believe your government should approach transportation like my neighbor approaches it. He could afford a much more expensive car but says it is just a way to get to and from work, and he would rather spend his money on other things—especially since a car is something that goes down in value no matter how well you maintain it or what you do. We are paying less for these buses than my neighbor did for my car.

Last, the truth is the State Department of Education was forced to do something because funding for new school buses has not been a high priority on the General Assembly's list. The State Department of Education has asked the General Assembly to provide the funds to replace buses every 15 years or 250,000 miles, whichever comes last, but we are not even close to doing this.

Funding for school buses hasn't even been seriously considered in the three years I have served in the South Carolina House. We have around 5,711 buses in the state's fleet with an average age of 13.3 years old. The State Department is replacing 1982 school buses with used 1992 buses at a cost of \$3,025 a piece. A brand-new bus costs around \$54,500. If you replaced 10 percent of the fleet annually, it would cost an additional \$30 million per year to do it with brand-new buses as opposed to the used buses. This is \$30 million of your money we are not spending, and that is why I do not understand why more of my conservative friends are not supporting this idea.

Some are using the used bus argument to push for the privatization of our state's school bus fleet. I am a proponent of delivering services in the most efficient and cost-effective way, and I agree that we ought to look at privatizing our state's bus fleet. The big question that needs to be answered with regards to privatization is: "Will it save money not only in the short term but also over the long term?"

I would like to hear your thoughts on this issue of whether or not we need to be spending taxpayer dollars on used school buses. Please log on to thecolumbiarecord.com and share your thoughts with James Smith and me at Palmetto State Politics.

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2005–06 South Carolina School Bus Accident Rates Lower

School bus accident rates through February 2006 show that South Carolina school bus drivers were involved in 118 fewer accidents than last year during the same period. This school year, buses have been involved in a total of 241 accidents as opposed to 359 accidents by this time in the 2004–05 school year. There have been 91 bus-driver-at-fault accidents this school year, 55 fewer than for this period last school year.

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WANTED: transportation news to be included in the next issue of *S.T.O.P.* Please fax your news articles to John Dozier at 803-734-8254 or e-mail them to him at jdozier@sde.state.sc.us.

You may also send news items and comments to this address: State Department of Education, Office of Transportation, 1429 Senate Street, Room 211, Columbia, SC 29201.